

MAY 1382 CHURCH COUNCIL AT BLACKFRIARS

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Peasants' Bising, it would be a mistake to suppose that the persecution of 1382 and the following years was not essentially religious. It was conducted in the Church Courts, the charges were charges of doctrinal heresy, the accused were religious missionaries, not agitators such as John Ball, and the principal question at issue was the right of the heretics to hold their new doctrine of Consubstantiation. This heresy of Wycliffe's instantly absorbed public attention and became the centre of the controversy. It shocked the great supporters who had stood by him when he merely attacked Church privilege. John of Gaunt repudiated such a wicked and blasphemous conception of the Eucharist in language which probably was sincere. This doctrine, combined with the general suspicion of revolutionary tendencies, alienated the nobles and the Court. The Lollardry of the eighties, unlike the Wycliffism of the seventies, was not a political attack on clerical privilege with a chance of immediate success, but a new religion that could be tested only in the slow crucible of time.

In May 1382 Courtenay's campaign began. He summoned to the Blackfriars' convent in London a Council of the province of Canterbury, before which he brought up Wycliffe's opinions for judgment. First in the list of heresies came the doctrine of Consubstantiation ; next the propositions that a priest in mortal sin could not administer the Sacraments, and that Christ did not ordain the ceremonies of the Mass. Two other heresies are of equal note : ' that if a man be contrite, all exterior confession is superfluous or useless,' and ' that after Urban the Sixth no one ought to be received as Pope, but men should live, after the manner of the Greek Church, under their own laws.' Wycliffe's views on the temporalities of the clergy, and the uselessness of the regular orders, were also condemned. Lollardry was for the first time put definitely under the ban of the Church, and war was formally declared by the Bishops against the itinerant preachers.¹

The council at Blackfriars was spoken of throughout England as a new and important move in the game. A curious accident enabled Wycliffe's friends to boast that,

¹ *Fasc. Z.*, 277-82.